

inge brid that singeth on the heye branch/
es, that is to seyn, in the wode, and after
is enclosed in a streyt cage: although that
the pleying businesse of men yeveth hem
honiede drinks & large metes with swete
studie, yit natheles, yif thilke brid, skip-
pinge out of hir streyte cage, seeth the a-
greables shadewes of the wodes, she de-
fouleth with hir feet hir metes yshad, and
seketh mourninge only the wode; & twit-
ereth, desiringe the wode, with hir swete
vois. The yerde of a tree, that is haled a-
doun by mighty strengthe, boweth redily
the crop adoun: but yif that the hand of
him that it bente lat it gon ayein, anon the
crop loketh upright to hevne. The sonne
Phebus, that falleth at even in the west-
rene wawes, retorneth ayein eftsones his
carte, by privree path, theras it is wont a-
ryse. Alle thinges seken ayein to hir propre
cours, and alle thinges rejoysen hem of hir
retorninge ayein to hir nature. Ne non or-
dinaunce nis bitaken to thinges, but that
that hath joynd the endinge to the begin-
ninge, and hath maketh the cours of itself
stable, that it chaungeth nat from his
propre kinde.

Prose III.

Vos quoque, o terrena animalia.



ERTES also ye
men, that ben erthe-
liche beestes, dre-
men alwey youre be-
ginninge, although
it be with a thinne
imaginacioun; & by
a maner thoughte,
albe it nat cleerly ne
parfittly, ye loken
fram afer to thilke verray fyn of blisful-
nesse; & therfore naturel entencioun ledeth
you to thilke verray good, but many maner
errours mistorneth you therfro. Consider
now yif that by thilke thinges, by whiche
a man weneth to geten him blisfulnesse,
yif that he may comen to thilke ende that
he weneth to come by nature. for yif that
moneye or honours, or thise other for-
seyde thinges bringen to men swich a thing
that no good ne fayle hem ne semeth fayle,
certes than wole I graunte that they ben
maketh blisful by thilke thinges that they
han geten. But yif so be that thilke thinges
nemowen nat performen that they bihten,
and that ther be defaute of manye goodes,
sheweth it nat thanne cleerly that fals
beautee of blisfulnesse is knowen and a-
teint in thilke thinges? first and forward
thou thyself, that haddest habundaunces
of riches nat long ago, I axe yif that,
in the habundaunce of alle thilke riches,
thou were never anguissous or sorry in thy

corage of any wrong or grevaunce that bi-
tidde thee on any syde?

ERTES, quod I, it ne remembreth
me nat that evere I was so free of
my thought that I ne was alwey in
anguissous of somwhat.

AND was nat that, quod she, for that
the lakked somwhat that thou hold-
dest nat han lakked, or elles thou had-
dest that thou noldest nat han had? Right
so is it, quod I.

THANNE desiredest thou the pre-
sence of that oon and the absence
of that other? I graunte wel,
quod I, forsothe, quod she, thanne nedest
ther somwhat that every man desirith?

Ye, ther nedest, quod I.
ERTES, quod she, & he that hath
lakke or nede of aught nis nat in
every wey suffisaunt to himself?

No, quod I.
AND thou, quod she, in al the plente of
thy riches haddest thilke lakke of
suffisaunce? What elles? quod I.

THANNE may nat riches maken
that a man nis nedy, ne that he be
suffisaunt to himself; & that was
it that they bihten, as it semeth. And
eek certes I trowe, that this be gretly to
considere, that moneye ne hath nat in his
owne kinde that it ne may ben binomen
of hem that han it, maugre hem? I bihten
it wel, quod I.

WHY sholdest thou nat bihten
it, quod she, whan every day the
strenger folk binomen it fro the
febler, maugre hem? for whennes comen
elles alle thise foreyne compleyntes or
querelles of pletinges, but for that men
axen ayein here moneye that hath ben bi-
nomen hem by force or by gyle, and alwey
maugre hem? Right so is it, quod I.

THAN, quod she, hath a man nede to
seken him foreyne helpe by whiche
he may defende his moneye? Who
may sey nay? quod I.

ERTES, quod she; & him nedede
non help, yif he ne hadden no moneye
that he might lese? That is
douteles, quod I.

THAN is this thinge torned into the
contrarye, quod she, for riches,
that men wenen sholde make suffi-
saunce, they maken a man rather han nede
of foreyne help! Which is the manere of the
gyse, quod she, that riches may dryve
away nede? Riche folk, may they neither
han hunger ne thurst? Thise riche men,
may they fele no cold on hir limes on win-
ter? But thou wolt answeren, that riche
men han ynow wherwith they may staunchen
en hir hunger, slaken hir thurst, and don
away cold. In this wyse may nede be coun-

forted by riches; but certes, nede ne
may nat aloutrely ben don away. for though
this nede, that is alwey gapinge and gredy,
be fulfilled with riches, & axe any thing,
ye dwelleth thanne a nede that mighte be
fulfilled. I holdemestille, & telle nat how that
lifel thing suffiseth to nature; but certes to
avarice ynough ne suffiseth nothing. for
sin that riches ne may nat al don away
nede, but riches maken nede, what may
it thanne be, that ye wenen that riches
mowen yeven you suffisaunce?

Metre III.
Quamvis fluente dives auri gurgite.

WERE it so that a riche covy-
tous man hadde a river flet-
tinge al of gold, yit sholde it
never staunchen his covetise;
ise; and though he hadde his
nekke ycharged with preci-
ous stones of the rede see, and though he
do ere his felde plentivous with an hun-
dred oxen, never ne shal his bytinge visi-
nesse forleten him whyl he liveth, ne the
lighte riches ne sholle nat beren him
companye whan he is ded.

Prose IV.

Set dignitates.

AT dignitees, to whom
they ben comen, mak-
en they him honorable
& reverent? Han they
nat so gret strengthe,
that they may putte
vertues in the hertes
of folk that usen the
lordshipes of hem?

Orelles may they don
away the vyces? Certes, they ne benat wont
to don away wikkednesse, but they ben
wont rather to shewen wikkednesse. And
therof comth it that I have right grette des-
drem, that dignitees ben yeven of tete wikk-
ed men; for which thing Catullus cleped
a consul of Rome, that highte Nonius,
Postum or Boch; as who seyth, he cleped
him a congregacioun of vyces in his brest,

as a postum is ful of corrupcioun, al were
this Nonius set in a chayre of dignitee.
Seest thou nat thanne how gret vilenye
dignitees don to wikked men? Certes, un-
worthinesse of wikked men sholde be the
lasse ysene, yif they nere renommed of none
honours. Certes, thou thyself ne mightest
nat ben brought with as manye perils as
thou mightest suffren that thou woldest
beren the magistrat with Decorat; that is
to seyn, that for no peril that mighte be-
fallen thee by offence of the king Theo-
dovike, thou noldest nat be felawe in gov-
ernaunce with Decorat; whan thou saye

that he hadde wikked corage of a likerous
shrewe and of an accusor. Ne I ne may nat,
for swiche honours, jugen hem worthy of
reverence, that I deme and holde unworthy
to han thilke same honours. Now yif thou
saye a man that were fulfilled of wisdom,
certes, thou ne mightest nat deme that he
were unworthy to the honour, or elles to
the wisdom of which he is fulfilled? No,
quod I. Certes, dignitees, quod she, a-
pertienen proprely to vertu; & vertu trans-
porteth dignitee anon to thilke man to
which she herself is conjoined. And for
as moche as honours of poeple ne may nat
maken folk digne of honour, it is wel seyn
cleerly that they ne han no propre beautee
of dignitee. And yit men oughten taken
more heed in this. for yif it so be that a
wikked wight besomochel the foulere and
the more outcast, that he is despyssed of
most folk, so as dignitee ne may nat mak-
en shrewes digne of reverence, the which
shrewes dignitee sheweth to moche folk,
thanne maketh dignitee shrewes rather so
moche more despyssed than preyssed; and
forsothe nat unpunished: that is for to
seyn, that shrewes revengen hem ayein-
ward upon dignitees; for they yilden ayein
to dignitees as gret guerdoun, whan they
bispotten and defoulen dignitees with hir
vilenye. And for as mochel as thou mowe
knowe that thilke verray reverence ne may
nat comen by thise shadewy transitorie
dignitees, undirstond now thus: yif that
a man hadde used & had many maner dig-
nitees of consules, and were comen pera-
venture amonge straunge nacions, sholde
thilke honour maken him worshipful and
redouted of straunge folk? Certes, yif
that honour of poeple were a naturel yift
to dignitees, if ne mighte never cesen no-
wher amonges no maner folk to don his
office, right as fyr in every contree nestint/
eth nat to eschaufen and to ben hoot. But
for as moche as for to ben holden honour-
able or reverent ne cometh nat to folk of
hir propre strengthe of nature, but only of
the false opinioun of folk, that is to seyn,
that wenen that dignitees maken folk dig-
ne of honour; anon therfore whan that they
comen theras folk ne knowen nat thilke
dignitees, hir honours vanisshen away, &
that anon. But that is amonges straunge
folk, mayst thou seyn; but amonges hem
ther they weren born, ne duren nat thilke
dignitees alwey? Certes, the dignitee of
the provostrie of Rome was whylom a gret
power; now is it nothing but an ydel name,
& the rente of the senatorie a gret charge.
And yif a wight whylom hadde the office to
taken hede to the vitales of the poeple, as
of corn & other thinges, he was holden a-
monges grete; but what thing is now more